DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 676 CE 083 159

AUTHOR	Salling Olesen, Henning
TITLE	Experience and Life History. Roskilde University Life History Project Paper.
INSTITUTION	Roskilde Univ. Center (Denmark).
REPORT NO	No-9
ISBN	ISBN-87-7349-486-0
ISSN	ISSN-1395-6833
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	22p.; Also No. 114/2000 in the series "Publications from the Adult Education Research Group" [Skriftserie fra Erhvervs-og voksenuddannelsesgruppen]. Paper first presented at the annual meeting of the Nordic Association for Educational Research (27th, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1999) and revised for the ESREA research network conference "Gender, Learning and Biography" (Roskilde, Denmark, March 16-19, 2000).
AVAILABLE FROM	Roskilde University, P10, Postboks 260, DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark (free). E-mail: KAC@RUC.DK.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Biographies; Continuing Education; Educational Research; Experience; Foreign Countries; Hermeneutics; Holistic Approach; *Learning Experience; Learning Motivation; *Learning Processes; Learning Theories; Life Events; *Lifelong Learning; *Personal Narratives; Postsecondary Education; *Research Methodology; Research Projects
IDENTIFIERS	Denmark

ABSTRACT

The Life History Project at Denmark's Roskilde University is a 5-year research project that was initiated in 1998 to examine learning and participation in adult and continuing education from a life history perspective. The project was designed to build on a broad range of qualitative interview studies and case studies into learning processes. The research methodology designed for the project was grounded in the critical theory tradition and in the following premises: (1) the need to adopt a "holistic" approach that takes the learner's perspective; (2) the notion of experience and the specificity of the learning subject; (3) the need to move beyond conventional hermeneutics to "in-depth hermeneutics," which involves looking for meanings and implications going beyond the knowledge or intent of the acting, knowing, or speaking subject; and (4) the notion that a learning subject is a historical product of modernity and the need to relate it to a dynamic-utopian concept of a learning individual. (Contains 12 references.) (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Henning Salling Olesen

Experience and Life History

ED 477 676

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. Olesen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Paper no. 9
Life History Project
Roskilde University

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Experience and Life History
by Henning Salling Olesen

Paper no. 9 from the Life History Project

Senior Researchers:
Anders Siig Andersen
Linda Andersen
Betina Dybbroe
Leif Hansen
Kirsten Larsen
Henning Salling Olesen
Finn M. Sommer
Lars Ulriksen
Kirsten Weber

Associated Research Fellows:
Rudi Rusfort Kragh
Steen Baagøe Nielsen

Published by
Adult Education Research Group
Roskilde University, Box 260, P10
DK - 4000 Roskilde
Telephone: +45 46 74 25 15
Fax: +45 46 74 30 70

The publication is no. 114/2000 in the series "Skriftserie fra Erhvervs- og voksenuddannelsesgruppen" [Publications from the Adult Education Research Group]

ISBN: 87-7349-486-0
ISSN: 1395-6833

Copyright: The author, 2000
Cover: Morten Vest

Printed by: Trykkeriet, RUC

Members of the Adult Education Research Group by June 2000:
Anders Siig Andersen, Linda Andersen, Vibeke Andersen, Karin Bendtsen, Karina Carlsen, Søren Dupont, Betina Dybbroe, Liselotte Gregart, Leif Hansen, Katrin Hjort, Knud Illeris, Christian Helms Jørgensen, Jan Kampmann, Randi Kaas, Christian Kjærsgaard, Kirsten Larsen, Vibeke Lihn, Birger Steen Nielsen, Henning Salling Olesen, Jørgen Rafn, Birgitte Simonsen, Finn M. Sommer, Lars Ulriksen, Niels Warring and Kirsten Weber

Henning Salling Olesen

Experience and Life History

Paper no. 9
Life History Project
Roskilde University

CONTENTS

EXPERIENCE AND LIFE HISTORY

1. Taking the Learner's Perspective
- the need for new approaches in education research 5

2. The Notion af Experience,
and the Specificity of the Learning Subject 9

3. Methodology: Hermeneutics - and beyond 13

4. The Learning Subject
- an Upcoming Reality, or an Ideological Construct 16

References 18

EXPERIENCE AND LIFE HISTORY

First presented at the 1999 conference of Nordic Association for Educational Research, Copenhagen. Revised at the occasion of ESREA conference in Roskilde, march 2000.

This paper presents some of the specific theoretical assumptions and methodological ideas of the Life History Project at Roskilde University, a 5 year research programme initiated in 1998. Building on a broad range of qualitative interview studies and case studies into learning processes, the project will study learning and participation in adult and continuing education in a life history perspective. Thematically the project will focus on the subjectivity of work and on gender. I have summarized more broadly background and reasons for this approach in (1997). Some more details about the project is given in partly overlapping working papers (in English: Weber (1998), in Danish: Salling Olesen (1998), respectively).

Referring to these presentations I would like to highlight a few general points that are significant in the context of educational research:

1. Taking the Learner's Perspective - the need for new approaches in education research

Educators, idealists and politicians still forget themselves and think about what education can do for the learners, and not least: Convince people not yet visiting education to do so. Learning is still largely conceived within the framework of institutional education, also within adult and continuing education. This thinking goes with the basic modernization, institution building, adding schools for adults to the schools for children and adolescents. So installation of a learners perspective in research is still a point in relation to the internal discourse in the educational community.

However, especially in adult and continuing education there is also a convert process going on, a de-institutionalizing process, broadening the concept of learning across the boundaries of school. And in a broader public the focus on non-institutional learning is becoming a common place - the overall political discussion has shifted into emphasizing learning rather than education. Educational institutions are partly regarded unable or inadequate to fill their purpose and promises, or they might even be an obstacle to

learning. The notion of Lifelong Learning has gained new strength, although with new meanings. Once a programmatic term of egalitarian education, literacy and enlightenment it now encompasses also the criticism to the modern confidence in education and the dislocation of the focus from education to new learning arenas.

This shift in discourses invites for critical examination. The broader context of learning, which has come into the scope of attention, must be reflected in education research - theory and methodology must contribute to this discussion of new agendas and illuminate the contradictions and implications embedded in new discourses.

Lifelong learning is now a catchword shared by a number of discourses of which I shall three: capitalist human resource strategies, post modern critiques, as well as critical theory. A closer look reveals that these conceptions have quite different ways of focussing learning. And the ways of conceptualising learning have implications for research strategies as well as political perspectives.

The prevailing new discourse seems to be the human resource management thinking, which has been able to put lifelong learning on a political agenda. It reflects a new consciousness of the importance of developing the human beings who embody the labour force. In spite of this recognition it is also still informed by an economic rationale. The interest into learning in general is rather attached to an abstract capacity than to concrete people and their interests. Educational traditions are left behind. However the thinking often introduces a new implicit locus or context: Catchwords like organizational learning and learning organizations connect the learning and the human resources closely to the enterprise and its missions, social controls etc. Learning as the acquisition of competences and skills embedded in the functional and cultural context of the workplace in a more or less functionalistic way, thereby implicitly or explicitly acknowledging the legitimacy and the scope of this context. However the trend is contradictory - the amalgamation with critical versions of organization analysis also include critical cultural approaches which much in line with post modern positions see the organization as a stage for individual biographies and contradictory cultural meaning production, and so linked with life worlds of real people outside the domain of the corporation and its economic rationale. Studying organi-

zational learning from a social practice perspective relates the learning process to individual identities and trajectories (e.g. Wenger, 1997).

The post modernist critique of modern education ideas also departs from educational traditions. Referring to i.a. Foucault, it points out the inner relation between institutions, knowledge and power. Educational institutions, by means of knowledge exercise control and restriction on the experience potential of the protagonists, allowing for some organizations of knowledge and blocking others. The term discourse in this context has the critical implication that all organized knowledge and communication excludes essential levels of knowledge related to practices and bodily experience, and reproduces power relations. Postmodernist critique of modernist educational idealism instead emphasize the situational quality of learning, located in multiple cultural settings, and seems to re-focus on the individual subject in an ever-changing individual acquisition of new life conditions, life as one long learning process. It has no specific locus but it rather refers to leisure and cultural life than to work.

Critical Theory tradition share much of the institution critiques of both positions, and with postmodern positions the idea to study learning as a multiple, subjective process in all domains of everyday life, an unpredictable cultural production of experience full with contradictions and variations. Life Long Learning is used as a framing notion for the comprehensiveness and openness of learning - and thereby as a 'deconstruction' or an 'ideology critique' of educational discourses and institutional idealism, to put it the phrasing of each of these traditions. Reflecting different backgrounds - critical thought in Anglo-Saxon and German academic traditions respectively, post modern positions in learning and critical theory probably appear more different than they are - and it seems an interesting theoretical issue to explore the differences. The life history approach, studying the life long learning process from the side of the subject, the learner, encompasses - or enables - some of this exploration. Presenting this paper in a European audience is i.a. meant as an invitation.

In opposition to post modern positions critical theory further pays primary attention to socialisation, the basic production of human subjectivity. Synthesizing theoretical background in marxism and psychoanalysis, critical theory emphasizes the socially produced and historically dynamic character of human subjectivity, and its inner contradictions.

This production of subjectivity is in it self a life long learning process, and it is not an entirely individual process. 'Individual' is not always a subject - in many ways according to Critical Theory exactly the opposite is the case, resulting from societal reification. And 'subjectivity', though most elementary appearing to be the individual dealing autonomously and consciously with social reality, may also be seen as a quality of a collective, conscious practice.

The psychoanalytic framework is meant to theorize the ways in which culture does not exist in the form social and artefactual meanings, symbols etc - but also as psychic component of individual subjectivity. It does not, as some tend to assume, refer to any idea about an individual psychological determinism. You might find 'essentialist humanists' in a critical theory tradition, who would ground subjectivity in a 'food package' prepared in early childhood, situated in a dichotomy between external social coercion and inner strive, but to us this is reductionism. The tradition, to which we mainly subscribe (Oskar Negt and others), puts more emphasis on the historical learning aspect - the emotional and cognitive capacity building through life history.

Consequently subjectivity is also a historical variable: Subjectivity in late modern life is itself a product of a modernized childhood and includes the experience of modernization, the subject is dialectically embedded in a social history. We rather see subjectivity as produced through individual life history, integrating the contradictions of social life, but also a capacity for a self regulated reconciliation or mediation between desires and social reality.

In line with post modernist thought this position implies the open and unpredictable quality of learning processes. However, as a difference, critical theory see subjectivity as something that is not just available but must be produced in an inner relation to historical societal conditions - so the challenge or utopia what in traditional modernist thought was conceived with the term 'Bildung' still remains as a (collective) political challenge. In this sense it remains pretty modernist.

Our life history approach is solidly founded in the critical theory tradition, though openly exploring some of the issues raised here, and empirically deeply involved in the issues of the human resource management thinking. The shift from 'education' to 'learning' just touched upon in this introduc-

tion presents some challenges for a critical educational research - including at least the following:

- We need a 'holistic' approach to learning and education, releasing it from the educational conditioning - an theory covering the abundant range of processes where learning takes place - but also transcending new 'loci' and new 'curricula' of learning presented by Human Recource Management (workplace, organization)

- We need methodologies that are sensitive to the individual and historical specificity of the learner, and to situational aspects

- We must reflect the historical question about the constitution of subjects in learning processes,

2. The Notion of Experience, and the Specificity of the Learning Subject

As a point of departure we suggest the concept of *experience* taken up from Adorno and Oskar Negt (recently commented in Negt 1999). It is a notion referring to the subject-object dialectic in the Hegelian sense, the consciousness being produced as well as presupposed in conscious and active social practise. Developed in the context of adult learning it refers to and at the same time contextualizes the potentials for experience by conscious and active practice in everyday life, to the life history dimension of individual experience, and to the objectivation of collective cultural experience in the form of knowledge. All three levels - learning, life experience, and knowledge - represent aspects or modalities of experience, and all are seen as internally defined through each others. "Experience is the process whereby we as human beings, individually and collectively, consciously master reality, and the ever-living understanding of this reality and our relation to it" (Salling Olesen, 1989 : p6-7).

This conceptual framework brings learning into the context of conditions and forms of apprehension of reality in everyday life. Previous experience form the preconditions for the future ones, but consciousness is embedded in practical interaction, incorporating all its meanings for the experiencing subject(s), the emotions connected with this situation, the perception of one self and the situation - even in cases of strong *resistance to learning* . Clear-

ly learning in everyday life is not a cognitive phenomenon only. When new phenomena are reduced into well known as a basic mechanism of recognition and complexity reduction - it is a precess guided by the emotions attached to these well known categories, to the situation and to projected expectations within it. And as learning is basically related to observation and systematization of deviations - be they new phenomena or new contextual factors - then this is process of cognitive as well as of emotional and social change of the learner.

Everyday life social practices provide a horizon for understanding the situation that is closely related to collective and habitual routines. The maintenance of a routine, is an active editing of perceptions and knowledge in accordance with possible practices - a defence mechanism. I call this consciousness "everyday life consciousness", with a concept (Altagsbewusstsein) borrowed from Leithäuser and others (Leithäuser, 1976). Leithäuser gives a theoretical framework for understanding the subejctive dynamic of this consciousness: In a life situation flooded with impulses and demands, individual and collective mechanisms of consciousness building preserves the individual from anxieties and ambivalences. The interpretation of observations and problems is a part of an active, psychic and cultural acquisition which define the situation in a practicable way - i.e. through active, partly collective defence mechanisms.

However, in the harmonizing and conflict avoiding mechanisms of the consciousness building are also embedded a deeply rooted 'awareness' of problems put aside, alternative social practices, 'unlived lives' from ones own life history, painful experiences from the past - all mixed up and interwoven with trivial aspects and incidents, technical circumstances and the practical routines of everyday life. So in the everyday life consciousness is comprised also a potential for seeing things differently and for alternative social practice. Working these contradictions out is the experience in the Hegelian sense, and it illuminates how the potential for learning is embedded in everyday life practice. The potential for learning is in reconfigurations of these contradictory ways of seeing a situation, a phenomenon, and the cognition is linked with emotional and practical aspects of the learner' s involvement in that situation.

Every day life practice and experience is at part of a subjective life history. The same reality and the same knowledges may have an entirely different

meaning to different people, they are embedded in an experience which is not necessarily entirely accessible to conscious elaboration, but which is never the less active in the learning process. That's why learning is unpredictable and not easily controlled.

We may further illuminates the nature of knowledge, and its relation to experience in a new way - emphasizing social relativity and practical embeddedness of knowledge. Knowledge may be present in these contradictory aspects of consciousness, as ways of seeing them. And the other way round: Knowledge is always known by somebody in some context, so it always is embedded in social practices, as has sociology of knowledge as well as post modern philosphy pointed out from quite different angles. There is no *absolute* difference between 'scientific knowledge', 'formal knowledge', 'knowledges of social practice', and 'everyday life consciousness' (there may definitely be important genetic and typological differences). The questions about 'who', 'where' and 'when' of knowing and learning are always productive. Recent powerful discussions about 'situated learning' and ' knowledge embedded in social practices' (or: 'practical reason and skill....[as] ...knowledge in its own right' illustrates this, but they also need to be redefined within this concept.

The relation between cultural and historical, objectified knowledge and the subjective acquisition and meaning of it is a duplicate complication: On the one side the life history produces symbols, meanings and language, informed by a socialization process and its contradictions, always involving the individual emotionally and relationally. The means of intersubjective communication and consciousness, language, symbols and meanings are thus informed by this life history experience. And on the other side the fact that societal structures and social relations do not appear immediately and transparently to the perceptive eye - they can only be understood by interpretation and reconstruction on an intersubjective/cultural level. Knowledge as a social construct with a historical genesis and implication, always acquired and reconstructed - is always processed in the media of language and symbols produced in the socializations of all individuals involved..

Alfred Lorenzers materialist theory of socialization (Lorenzer, 1972) provides an essential link between the individual subjectivity (the embodying of psyche) and the culture and language (the codifying of knowledge and collective experience): The biological development and the (necessary)

social interaction around the needs of the child gradually are intertwined in the production of the individual subjectivity. The Mother-Child-Dyade is the first 'common subject' for this production of patterns of practice. Later, through the gradual separation of the child from the mother, the interaction becomes the production process of the *interaction patterns* of the child and acquisition of language. Or: Through the separation and the interaction with physical and social reality the child gradually build up its individual subjectivity. Contradictions of societal structure and the cultural way of signifying them are built into a systematically contradictory, though individual, subjectivity.

So: the way of learning and knowing is always taking place in media informed by individual history. However, concrete objective reality is by no means less important. Only you cannot see the interaction between learning subject and objective context in a simple way of creating a reproductive image (naturalism). - On the contrary: Learning and knowing is still about a subject relating to an objective reality, and taking place in a subject-object interaction - the issue of learning theory is in a way the same as to depart from naturalism without arriving in a relativistic constructivism. In Adorno's criticism of positivist social science he points out that the point of the critical theory is to reconfigure the social 'fact' or action in its historical and subjective context, i.e. to understand it in its dynamics rather that as a fixed, reified object. Since the experiencing subjects (the social scientist) is already a part of the social reality, this position also reinstalls the historical and subjective nature of critical theory as an act of learning about reality and about yourself at the same time. Although we are not pursuing a knowledge sociology or metascientific question here, this is basic framework of understanding learning as an experiencing process.

Let me try to elaborate this a bit closer on what we normally regard as learning. First: Any phenomenon and action should reconfigured in its historical and subjective nature. We encounter all phenomena and actions in situations of social practice, our need to deal with them and understand them are always already embedded in this situation. The recognition of a situation relates it subjectively to previous experiences also in the sense of emotional qualities and identity components. To recognize novelties of that situation is the same as to differentiate it in a double manner: From other objective situations, that appear similar, and from the situative images from life history. Both differentiations are cognitive as well as emotional - but they

involve different positions of the subject in relation to the situations. What you would otherwise term a defensive personality must be contextualized as a subjective relation to a specific situation and a way of knowing in it, and so also including ambivalences, e.g. potential for learning. The strongest and most important learning processes may be expected to take off from collectively codified 'everyday life consciousness'.Even collective theories and assumptions, that are explicit and entirely cognitive in their form, that are even built into an organisation may be connected with life history images more or less individual- like analysed in organization psychology (Menzies-Lyth) . E.g. they are also subjective experiences with ambivalences - and therefore potentials for learning.

For methodology this has implications dealt with below. For learning theory it means that every learning process is an individual, subjective interpretation process, which is of course systematically variable in some respects like gender, class, and situational context.

With the attempt to reshape theory of (adult)learning within this concept, logically follows the need or the drive to develop some of the specifications, the historical dependency and limitation. The life history approach is meant to encompass an empirical study into learning processes and into learning/educational careers, that will enable us to theorize learning in a historical context: People learn in their social practices of their time and situation, and in the way they have been socialized - and yet their learning depends on themselves and on environments offered. Our access to their learning is an interactive interpretation.

3. Methodology: Hermeneutics - and beyond

By focussing on life history we have assumed that learning processes and participation in education is strongly embedded in an (individual) life history, in which social circumstances and framing conditions are subjectively integrated - culture or the social is not absent in subjective accounts but they are present in an individually specific subjective version.

The reason for applying the individual life history is not one of explanation - which might also be possible: Examining the longitudinal causalities in a life course as a major explanation of learning and participation. The reason is a belief in the importance of the subjective aspect of learning itself, in-

cluding the basic symbolic character of the conceptual and habitual changes taking place in learning processes.

Basically a life history approach is trying to *understand* the subjective perspective of learning and participation in education. So our interest is a hermeneutic one. We invite subjective expressions in interviews or conversations, we turn it into texts, and we interpret it in order to understand the subjective transaction or experience in which they were embedded . The format of the production of expressions and the procedure of making it into text are of course important aspects of the interpretation. Hermeneutics assumes the possibility of establishing a communal horizon, enabling understanding, on the basis of an everyday language or a shared tradition of meaning. So do we. But we also assume that this mutual understanding is problematic and dynamic in two specific, and interrelated, manners: The appearance of societal contradictions in everyday life and language, and the psychodynamic nature of the communicative situation. One underlying assumption goes back to marxian social theory assuming that the societal constitution of social relations lets strucural dynamics appear as interaction between independent subjects. Another refers to psychoanalytic theory about the unconscious dynamics as a level of subjectivity, which may influence consciousness and communication. The theory of socialization by Lorenzer includes gives a suggestion about the way in which contradictory social conditions are experienced individually and how the socialization - especially the language acqusition - allows certain experiences to become social and linguisticially explicit, and others are only in (individually) cleaved and distorted ways.

The social interaction with its hidden structural contradictions is experienced in the process of the early child development, driven by biological development, fundamental needs and the child's dependent interaction with the world, and so producing a complicated relation between the social meanings in language and life history experience with all its bodily, emotional and relational aspects. The outcome is a *basic distortion of language* - the cognitive and communicative potentials of language are shaped by emotional and relational experiences, that can be theorized within psychoanalytical frameworks. According to Lorenzer language encompasses beside normal *symbols*, that connect socially acknowledged meanings with experiences in socially acknowledged 'Sprachspiele' also linguistic expressions resulting from cleaved interactions - reified *signs*, well defined in

language but isolated from their experiental meaning, and *klichées* being linguistic entities directed by traumatic emotional reactions, that have been dissolved from their original experiental content.

The important point here is not Lorenzer's specific theory of language acquisition and socialization, but its implications for the role of language in researching subjectivity.

Understanding means to establish the 'communication' between 'text' and 'interpreter' - but it must try to go one step further by means of constructive interpretation based on theoretical and intuitive knowledge. It is assumed that this distortion of language takes historically specific shapes, informed by historical contradictions, but they are also individual, informed by life history experience. It is assumed that the it refers to real social circumstances Although you may assume a certain parallelism of shared unconscious experiences they are not collective. Rather they are shades or 'pollution' within the language games consisting of and enabling a communicative understanding. To reconstruct their meaning means to go beyond the ordinary language games.

For this reason we have taken the notion of *in depth hermeneutics* as overall concept. We do not *only* take the subjective expressions of any type for granted - we allow ourselves to look for meanings and implications going beyond the knowledge or intent of the acting, knowing or speaking subject. Or: We conceive reality as contradictory and repressive, and assume that critical interpretation should always be an attempt to develop the underlying or repressed possible actions of the subject. From this follows a double attempt to 'deconstruct' the meanings and actions, and to 'construct' other possible meanings and actions.

The biographical narration performed in an interview may be an endeavour creating continuity and habitual meaning, a subjective construction activity. At the same time it may be prohibitive in relation to some other directions of learning. A group interaction involves the constitution of a common reference and solidarity in the group, which may enable collective ideas, but also exclude certain experience elements from the shared consciousness. Focussing the interpretation on the ruptures and 'holes' of this constructive activity may open new interpretations - as well as new learning opportunities of the protagonist.

However, following a materialist point of view: We have no other access to inner and outer realities, and the subjective interpretation of them, than *interpretation and interaction*. So our way to knowledge about social reality is depending on language. Knowledge is also produced by someone somewhere and by someone. Our knowledge of psychodynamic meanings and to societal structures are in principle of the same type, though depending on different theoretical additives.

This is important for our enterprise - we are not making a kind of explanatory overruling of our interviewees' self understanding - on the contrary: to understand is to look creatively, by theoretical means, for *inner and outer realities*, e.g structural aspects of social life that may be constructed as societal structures and as psychological structures, which are actively part of learning and consciousness although they may well reside beyond conscious regulation of social practice - and expression. Habermas has argued similarly, that the distorted Sprachspiele have implications also on the level of societal structures and their appearance. E.g. a qualitative approach to historical facts, which would also be called ideology critique, is an in-depth hermeneutic approach to consciousness of social appearance (in *Hermeneutik und Ideologikritik*, 1971)

Our different methodical procedures, inspired by existing empirical traditions, are quite different in the shaping of the data production (see comments in (1997)). The implications for interpretations is an issue of ongoing exploration - and of intense discussion in our research group.

In the same way you might probably discuss the relation to other qualitative methodologies, applying to learning processes from a learners' perspective. First of all an ethnographic or ethnomethodology approach. Studying the symbolic interaction and cultural meanings from below it will tend to construct cultural continuities or coherences - only they will be of a different kind than the biographical or individual life history.

4. The Learning Subject - an Upcoming Reality, or an Ideological Construct

I have discussed learning as basically embedded in social practice in a contradictory way, including progressions as well as regressions or closures. In the framework of the experience concept, progression is a thematization

of the contradictory conditions and experiences of life history, because it means 'bringing into language', whereas regression implies defensive social practices and consciousness. The potential for learning is in the fluent and ambivalent consciousness about reality and possible alternative routes of life and practice. The fact that we focus a life history framework installs the individual as the (relevant) learning subject.

The question now could be: Is that bound to be so? Or is it a new ideological construct of individual learning? I have been concerned with the constitution of a learning subject as a historical product of modernity, relating it to a dynamic-utopian concept of a learning individual. To the extent we do not study it (or construct it) as a dynamic and differentiated process in history, then we confirm an ideological image of the abstract individual.

But a few points more about the historical conditions of learning and subjectivity: Alheit (1994) seems to assume a qualitatively new capacity of modernized individuals to stand up to a life situation where traditional bonds on 'normal biography' are dissolved, presenting a demand onto the individual to shape a biography of your own life. He applies the concept of 'biographicity' for this surplus of biographical ressources, enabling the subjective shaping of life in several different directions within a certain structural constraint. Dausien (1996) discusses biographicity as a type of generic skill, allowing for a multiple shaping of life history within and at the same time transcending any given prescribed structure - in this case gender patterns.

However, she also parallels it with ambivalence, in this case the ambivalence of women in relation to gender. So the generic skill seems to rely on the one side on a surplus of possible ways of life, produced in life experience, on the other side with contradictory emotions - the unlived lives that might still also be options of a subjective dynamic, where recognition is closely related to emotional differentiation.

To transcend social patterns, i.e. to produce social change in biographical choices means to reorganize life experiences. Biographicity seems possible as a learning process, dealing with individual experiences as well as social and cultural prescriptions (knowledges). Although the framework is entirely different this comes quite close to the conception of learning as a double differentiation.

It would be interesting to discuss how this relates post modern positions in terms of 'similarities and differences', in continuation of the differences in the conceptions of lifelong learning touched on in §1. How do the learning activies of deconstructing and experimenting depend on previous experiences - from where do they get it?

References

Alheit, Peter (1995): *Taking the Knocks*, Cassell

Alheit/Bron/Brugger/Dominicé (1995): *The Biographical Approach in European Adult Education*, Verband Wiener Volksbildung

Alheit, Peter (1994): The Biographical Question as a Challenge to Adult Education, *International Review of Education,*, no 40

Andersen, Anders et al (1998): *Voksenliv og voksenlæring*, Småskrifter fra Livshistorieprojektet. 2

Dausien, B. (1996): *Biographie und Geschlecht. Zur biographischen Konstruktion sozialer Wirklichkeit in Frauenslebensgeschichten*. Bremen, Donat.

Habermas, J. (1971): *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*

Leithäuser, T (1976): *Formen des Alltagsbewusstseins*, Frankfurt/Campus

Negt, Oskar (1999): Adornos Begriff der Erfahrung, in: Schweppenhäuser (ed): *Impuls und Negativität. Argument Sonderband 229,* Hamburg.

Salling Olesen, H. (1989): *Adult Education and Everyday Life*. Roskilde, Adult Education Research Group

Salling Olesen,H. (1997) Experience, Life History, and Biography. A Biographical Approach to Adult Learning, in Olesen/Rasmussen (eds) (1997): *Theoretical Issues in Danish Adult Education*, Roskilde University Press

Kirsten Weber (ed) (1998): *Life History, Gender, and Experience*, Roskilde University Press

Wenger, E. (1998): *Communities of Practice.Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, NY Cambridge Univ Press

Papers from the Life History Project, Roskilde University:

1. Kirsten Weber
   Life History, Gender and Experience. Towards a New Understanding of Adult Learning

2. Anders Siig Andersen, Linda Andersen, Leif Hansen, Kirsten Larsen, Henning Salling Olesen, Finn M. Sommer, Lars Ulriksen & Kirsten Weber
   Voksenliv og voksenlæring. Voksne mænd og kvinders uddannelsesdeltagelse og læreprocesser i livshistorisk belysning

3. Kirsten Weber
   Dobbeltsocialisering - lønarbejde og livshistorie. Mest om mænd, familie og arbejde

4. Kirsten Weber
   Concepts of Life History and Biography: Understanding Lifelong Learning?

5. Kirsten Weber
   Voksenlivets rejse – livshistorien mellem positivisme og konstruktionisme

6. Henning Salling Olesen
   Professional Learning and Personal Development – Broadening the Lifelong Learning Agenda

7. Rudi Rusfort Kragh
   Triple-spiralen. En diskussion af Tom Schuller's teori

8. Linda Andersen
   Telling Modernization: Three Voices. Life History, Gender and the Discourse of Modernization

9. Henning Salling Olesen
   Experience and Life History

The Life History Project at Roskilde University is a long term research project, dealing with the importance of life history and everyday life for participation and learning in adult education. The project combines current European theoretical discourse on work, gender, adulthood and learning with a broad scope of empirical experience. The project is mainly funded by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities.

This paper presents the basic ideas and conceptual framework of the project addressing an international audience of education research: We want to develop a conceptual framework and methodology for the studying the historical production of subjectivity. *The general turn from 'education' to 'learning' discourses calls for theory taking the learner's perspective - with the risk of reinventing an abstract individual subject of learning processes. Or it may tend to reduce the subjective processes of learning to replica of social practices.* The notion of 'experience' relates learning processes to subjectivity and its historical specificity. The paper briefly outlines its background in psychoanalytical and critical theory, and its implications for understanding learning in everyday life. Next the paper comments methodological assumptions: A basic hermeneutic research interest, and the notion of deep hermeneutics specifying the interest in contextualizing the interpretation process in social history. Understanding learning subjectivity in the medium of language is closely related to the subjective and historical self-reflection of the research and theory itself.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Experience and Life History	
Author(s): Henning Salling Olesen	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: 2000

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☒

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: H Salling Olesen	Printed Name/Position/Title: Henning Salling Olesen	
Organization/Address: Roskilde Universitetscenter, P10, Box 260, 4000 Roskilde	Telephone: 4674 2672	FAX: 4674 3070
	E-Mail Address: hso@ruc.dk	Date:

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor: Roskilde University, P10
Address: Postboks 260 Dk-4000 Roskilde Denmark kac@ruc.dk
Price: Free

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: http://ericfacility.org